



# Chapter I. Overview of Weed and Seed

Violent crime in many American communities remains unacceptably high despite the significant accomplishments in crime reduction that have been made during the past decade. The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) implemented Operation Weed and Seed to address violent crime, gang activity, drug use, and drug trafficking in neighborhoods hardest hit by violence and eroding social and economic stability. Weed and Seed is designed to reduce the impact of violent crime on communities; provide prevention, intervention, and treatment services for substance abuse and other social problems; and revitalize communities through housing and economic development.

In 1991, DOJ established Operation Weed and Seed as a community-based multiagency approach to law enforcement, crime prevention, and neighborhood restoration. This initiative is a comprehensive strategy—not simply a program—to assist communities in bringing together people and resources to prevent and control crime and improve the overall quality of life. The Weed and Seed strategy stresses collaboration, coordination, and community participation. This approach gives communities experiencing high crime and social and economic decay a comprehensive structure, critical planning tools, and access to a national network focused on crime prevention, citizen safety, and neighborhood revitalization. This initiative is unique in that communities use the Weed and Seed strategy to develop and undertake efforts tailored to the issues, needs, and concerns of each individual neighborhood.

Operation Weed and Seed began in three pilot sites in 1991; it has spread quickly to designated high-crime neighborhoods across the Nation. By

2000, more than 250 communities had become Weed and Seed sites.

Weed and Seed is managed and administered at the national level through the Executive Office for Weed and Seed (EOWS), a program office within DOJ's Office Of Justice Programs. EOWS provides various services, technical assistance, training programs, and resources to support local Weed and Seed strategies. EOWS developed this manual to assist new and existing Weed and Seed sites with creating and implementing Weed and Seed strategies. Contact EOWS directly at 202-616-1152 for additional information on any of the issues discussed in this manual.

## Vision

The Weed and Seed strategy involves a two-pronged approach:

1. Law enforcement agencies and criminal justice officials cooperate to “*weed out*” criminals who are violent or abuse drugs to prevent them from victimizing residents in the designated area.
2. Social services and economic revitalization are brought in to “*seed*” the area to ensure long-term change and a higher quality of life for residents.

The Weed and Seed strategy recognizes the importance of coordinating Federal, State, and local offices; law enforcement agencies; and criminal justice initiatives with social service providers and private-sector and community efforts to maximize the impact of existing programs and resources and identify and fill in gaps in services. It also recognizes the importance of

community participation. Community residents must be centrally involved and empowered to assist in solving problems in their neighborhoods. In addition, the private sector is a pivotal partner in the Weed and Seed strategy.

## Goals and Objectives

The purpose of Weed and Seed is to reduce violent and drug-related crime from designated high-crime neighborhoods across the Nation. A comprehensive approach is used to reduce and prevent crime and improve residents' overall quality of life. As a result, law-abiding citizens will be able to live, work, and raise their families in a safer and more prosperous environment.

The primary objectives at each Weed and Seed site are to

- Develop a comprehensive community-based strategy to control and prevent violent crime, gang activity, drug trafficking, and drug-related crime.
- Coordinate existing and new government and private-sector initiatives, criminal justice efforts, and human services and concentrate those resources in designated neighborhoods to maximize their impact.



- Mobilize community residents to assist law enforcement in identifying and removing violent offenders and drug traffickers from their neighborhoods, assist human service agencies in identifying and responding to social service needs, and participate more fully in neighborhood planning and decisionmaking processes.

## Four Components

The Weed and Seed strategy is a multilevel strategic plan that includes four basic components:

- Law enforcement.
- Community policing.
- Prevention, intervention, and treatment.
- Neighborhood restoration.

Law enforcement and community policing represent the “weeding” aspect of the strategy. Prevention, intervention, and treatment and neighborhood restoration represent the “seed-ing” phase. Community policing is involved in both weeding and seeding activities and serves as a bridge between the two components.

### Law Enforcement

During the past 20 years, criminal justice researchers such as Alfred Blumstein, Jack Greene, George L. Kelling, and Lawrence Sherman have examined various aspects of policing practices. Their research findings provide the basis for the weeding portion of Weed and Seed, which focuses on both collaborative problem-solving processes and enforcement tactics to reduce and suppress crime at the neighborhood level.

The law enforcement component is designed to weed out crime and violence, particularly violent crime, gang activity, drug trafficking, and drug-related crime. Efforts are directed mainly at identifying, apprehending, and prosecuting the

most serious and visible criminals in the neighborhood. Reducing both crime and citizen fear gives back hope to residents living in distressed neighborhoods and sets the stage for community revitalization.

In most Weed and Seed sites, crime suppression activities are undertaken by joint task forces that represent a collaboration of law enforcement agencies from all levels of government and benefit from the various resources each agency brings to the effort. Suppression activities include repeat-offender programs, gun abatement, targeted patrols, intensified drug investigations, and targeted prosecutions. Other law enforcement tactics involve various aspects of the criminal justice system such as community courts, victim-witness protection and services, and offender reentry programs.

## Community Policing

Community policing supports intensive law enforcement operations and serves as a bridge to the seeding components of Weed and Seed. Community policing embraces two key concepts—community engagement and problem solving. Under this model of policing, officers establish an ongoing dialog with community residents to solve crime problems through a systematic process that addresses the underlying causes of crime. Community policing is based on studies conducted in the 1980s and early 1990s by the notable researchers Gary Cordner, John Eck, Herman Goldstein, and Robert Trojanowicz.

Community policing strategies foster a sense of responsibility within the community for solving crime problems, focus on increasing police visibility, and develop cooperative relationships between the police and residents. Examples of community policing activities include foot and bicycle patrols, police ministations, victim referrals to support services, nuisance abatement programs, and police athletic leagues.

Community mobilization is also important to community policing for crime prevention purposes. Programs that encourage community participation and help prevent crime include neighborhood watches, citizen marches and rallies, prayer services, drug-free zones, and graffiti removal.

## Prevention, Intervention, and Treatment

This component is based on studies by J. David Hawkins and Richard F. Catalano at the University of Washington in the early 1980s. These researchers and their colleagues reviewed studies conducted in the previous 30 years on youth substance abuse and delinquency. They identified two factors:

- Risk factors such as economic deprivation, family management problems, and early academic failure increase the likelihood that a child will develop health and behavior problems in adolescence.
- Protective factors such as individual characteristics, bonding, healthy beliefs, and clear standards set by parents and society reduce the impact of risk factors on children.

The prevention, intervention, and treatment component focuses on neighborhood efforts to enhance protective factors while reducing risks, thus promoting wholesome behavior that can lead to good health and well-being and personal success.

The prevention, intervention, and treatment component concentrates an array of human services on the designated neighborhood to create an environment in which crime and violence cannot thrive. Links among law enforcement and social service agencies, the private sector, and the community are strengthened to improve the overall quality of services to residents.

Activities in this area focus on community-based services such as childcare, afterschool programs,

parenting courses, drug prevention programs, mental health services, drug treatment, family counseling, and medical care. The **Safe Haven** program is a mechanism to organize and deliver an array of youth- and adult-oriented services in a multiservice setting such as a school or community center. Every Weed and Seed site is required to establish a Safe Haven.

### Neighborhood Restoration

During the past 30 years, numerous researchers have published books, reports, and white papers offering interesting and sometimes conflicting insights into the root causes associated with the deterioration of neighborhoods—particularly in urban cities. Leading researchers, including Jane Jacobs, Robert Meir, William Julius Wilson, Gerald Suttles, and other scholars, have examined the declining economic and social conditions within neighborhoods. The findings have encouraged community workers to develop new and comprehensive response strategies to address these conditions.



The fourth component of Weed and Seed attempts to improve and revitalize the economic and social conditions of distressed neighborhoods through neighborhood restoration strategies. This component addresses and seeks to expand the economic vitality of the community so that crime and disorder will not thrive. As with the other components, neighborhood restoration can be achieved only through the

coordinated use of Federal, State, local, and private-sector resources. Strategies focus on economic development, employment opportunities for residents, and improvements to the housing stock and physical environment of the neighborhood. Restoration activities include renovating and refurbishing housing and commercial establishments, improving public spaces such as parks and recreational facilities, and creating a solid economic foundation for entrepreneurship and job creation.

### Fundamental Principles

Four fundamental principles underlie the Weed and Seed strategy. These principles set Weed and Seed apart from traditional approaches and are key to the success of the strategy at the neighborhood level.

- **Collaboration.** Government departments at the Federal, State and local levels; social service agencies; community organizations; the private sector; and residents play important roles in community safety. Each has a responsibility to the community and a stake in its future. Weed and Seed requires communities to establish a collaborative process to capitalize on the full potential that the systematic interaction of stakeholders can provide. Collaboration leads to permanent channels of communication among stakeholders, partnerships among organizations with similar goals, and a strategic approach to effective crime prevention and restoration. Furthermore, such efforts encourage innovation, help build broad support for the Weed and Seed strategy, and bring about significant pressure that may lead to the acquisition of additional resources.
- **Coordination.** The number of government agencies and community organizations providing services to citizens is breathtaking. Stakeholders are probably not aware of the many service providers in the area, the goals

and objectives of each organization, and whether there are overlapping and duplicative services. Weed and Seed helps bring together the officials who represent these organizations and assists in coordinating their activities. This enables the Weed and Seed Steering Committee to concentrate resources in designated neighborhoods, better match services with community needs, eliminate overlap and duplication, and get the maximum benefit from existing services and programs. Both vertical coordination (across disciplines such as law enforcement, social services, and economic development) and horizontal coordination (across levels of government) are critical to the Weed and Seed strategy.

- **Community participation.** Communities that are empowered to solve their own problems function more effectively than communities that depend on services provided by outsiders. This is true for property owners who take better care of homes than renters and for workers who own part of the company and are more committed than those who simply collect a paycheck. Therefore, it follows that initiatives that empower communities to help themselves, involve residents in decisionmaking processes, and encourage broad citizen involvement will be more

effective than those designed to simply provide services to clients. A Humphrey Institute researcher claims:

Clients are people who are dependent upon and controlled by their helpers and leaders. Clients are people who understand themselves in terms of their deficiencies and people who wait for others to act on their behalf. Citizens, on the other hand, are people who understand their own problems in their own terms. Citizens perceive their relationship to one another and they believe in their capacity to act. Good clients make bad citizens. Good citizens make strong communities (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992).

- **Leveraging resources.** EOWS disseminates funding to local sites in support of their Weed and Seed strategies. These funds are limited, however, and they support Weed and Seed activities nationwide. This level of funding cannot provide the entire amount of resources required to transform and revitalize a neighborhood experiencing high crime and social and economic decay. Therefore, the Weed and Seed strategy is an opportunity for communities to leverage the available resources (e.g., funding, organizational structures) that will enable them to tap into additional fund-

ing streams and receive in-kind resources from Federal, State, and local agencies; foundations; corporations; and other organizations. A Weed and Seed site is well placed to capitalize on numerous funding sources in both the public and private sectors. In fact, Weed and Seed sites are expected to leverage all available resources to fully fund



their strategies for law enforcement, crime prevention, and neighborhood revitalization.

## Developing the Strategy

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The process for developing a Weed and Seed strategy requires a significant commitment from the community to engage in strategic planning, collaborate with key stakeholders, and coordinate programs and services. Strategic planning involves a specific process that will assist the community with identifying a future vision, managing change, and creating the best possible future for residents. The end result of the strategic planning process is a multiyear detailed plan for community action and change.

The basic characteristics of the strategic planning process are

- A focused process that concentrates on selected issues.
- Explicit consideration of resource availability.
- Assessment of community problems and needs.
- An action orientation, with a strong emphasis on practical results.
- An emphasis on innovative approaches to problem solving.

There are five basic planning stages involved in developing the Weed and Seed strategy. Although the strategic plans vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, the planning stages are common across all Weed and Seed sites:

**Stage 1:** Organize and convene a Weed and Seed Steering Committee.

**Stage 2:** Select or confirm the designated neighborhood.

**Stage 3:** Conduct a community needs assessment of the designated neighborhood.

**Stage 4:** Select priorities and strategies to address neighborhood problems and unmet needs.

**Stage 5:** Identify goals, objectives, and major tasks.

**Stage 6:** Develop an implementation plan.

Users of this manual should remember that working through the planning steps is *not* a neat, consecutive process. Work on more than one step typically occurs simultaneously. For example, selection of the Steering Committee may be in process while a community survey is administered in the designated neighborhood. The information in this manual must be viewed in terms of each community's context, character, and environment.